

VZCZCXRO8007  
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHMOS  
DE RUEHKU #0184/01 0211542  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 211542Z JAN 06  
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2587  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000184

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NSC FOR RAMCHAND , LONDON FOR TSOU,  
PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2015  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KU](#) [SUCCESSION](#)  
SUBJECT: ONGOING INTRA-RULING FAMILY NEGOTIATIONS ON  
SUCCESSION; PRIME MINISTER RUMOURED LIKELY NEW AMIR

REF: KUWAIT 97

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Members of the ruling Al-Sabah family have been meeting continuously over the past three days to negotiate distribution of power after the death of Amir Shaykh Jaber on January 15. Constitutionally, Crown Prince Shaykh Saad automatically became Amir, though his very poor health and questions about his ability to take the constitutionally-required two-sentence oath to assume the position have fueled speculation he will soon be replaced. On January 21, the Council of Ministers, after convening an emergency session, reportedly asked the National Assembly to invoke Article 3 of the Succession Law, which provides for removal of the Amir for health reasons. According to local media reports and embassy contacts, sixty ruling family members met on January 20 and agreed in principle on an arrangement whereby Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah would become the new Amir, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed the new Crown Prince, and Interior Minister Shaykh Nawaf the new Prime Minister. Countering what increasingly seems to be the majority view, National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, claiming to speak for the Amir, insisted Shaykh Saad would take the Amiri oath before a special session of Parliament on January 22. The appointment of Shaykh Sabah as Amir would merely formalize the power he has exercised for the past five years and would have little, if any, impact on government policy. As reported reftel, succession is likely to have a greater impact on distribution of power within the Council of Ministers. While rumors about succession abound, Kuwaitis agree on the need for a smooth transition of power; few, if any, would object to Shaykh Sabah becoming Amir, once that decision is made by the ruling family. Due both to the 40-day mourning period and the leadership discussions, the GOK has advised all diplomatic missions that it will not receive official visits until the end of the mourning period.  
End summary and comment.

Succession Referred to National Assembly

¶2. (U) Local media reported January 21 that the Council of Ministers, after meeting in an emergency session, sent a letter to the National Assembly asking it to invoke Article 3 of the Succession Law. Article 3 reads, "For the Amir to exercise his constitutional powers, he shall not lose any of the terms which shall be met by the Heir Apparent (Crown Prince). In the event he loses any of these terms or loses the health ability to exercise his powers, the Council of Ministers - after verification - shall refer the matter to the National Assembly to be immediately considered in a special closed-door session. If it is categorically proven to the National Assembly that he has lost the aforementioned

terms or health ability, the National Assembly shall decide, by a two-thirds majority of its members (43 votes), to transfer the exercising of the powers of Amir to the Heir Apparent temporarily or permanently."

¶3. (C) "Amir-designate" Shaykh Saad is reportedly insisting on taking the Amiri oath before the National Assembly on January 22, and has requested a ruling family meeting on January 21 to discuss the issue. (Comment: Shaykh Saad, s poor health makes it highly unlikely that he is making these decisions. End comment.) Sources suggest that ruling family members are not responding to "his" request.

#### Majority of Ruling Family Backs Shaykh Sabah

-----

¶4. (SBU) Sixty Al-Sabah family members, including the late Amir's sons, met the Prime Minister at his private residence, Dar Salwa, on the evening of January 20 to publicly express their support for his leadership. On January 21, under the headline, "Shaykh Sabah Takes Charge," the English-daily Kuwait Times reported that the Prime Minister had "agreed to lead the country" after being requested to do so by ruling family members during the January 20 meeting. The article also reported that controversial National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, claiming to speak "on behalf of the new Amir," said Shaykh Saad would "take the constitutional oath before Parliament" this week, apparently contradicting the majority consensus among ruling family members.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Waleed Ali Al-Khubaizi, Director of the Protocol Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the Ambassador on January 21 that during the January 20 meeting, ruling family members had agreed in principle on an

KUWAIT 00000184 002 OF 003

arrangement in which Shaykh Sabah, currently Prime Minister, would become Amir; Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Salem Al-Sabah, currently Foreign Minister, would become Crown Prince; and Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, currently Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, would become Prime Minister. Shaykh Salem Al-Ali's statements, however, have temporarily prevented moves to implement the arrangement, which even Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, s eldest sons supported, he said. Al-Khubaizi further noted that Shaykh Sabah does not want to be seen as forcing the abdication of Shaykh Saad and indicated there could be an agreed upon period - he mentioned eight days - for Shaykh Saad to remain Amir before being replaced. Al-Khubaizi believed Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, s comments had only further isolated him and represented only a minority within the ruling family. If appointed Amir, Shaykh Sabah would have one year to name a Crown Prince.

¶6. (C) In a January 20 meeting with visiting CODEL Ros-Lehtinen, Dr. Nasser Al-Sane, a moderate Islamist member of Parliament, confirmed "almost all" ruling family members had agreed to back Shaykh Sabah as the next Amir. According to Al-Sane, the influence of the "minority" within the ruling family, led by Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, that opposes Shaykh Sabah becoming Amir is weakening. He noted that several prominent members of the Al-Salem branch of the Al-Sabah family had publicly expressed their support for Shaykh Sabah by attending the January 20 meeting. Al-Sane expected a decision on succession to be announced shortly.

¶7. (SBU) Among the prominent Al-Sabah family members who attended the January 20 meeting were:

From the Al-Salem branch:

- Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah;
- Shaykh Fahad Al-Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the former Vice Chairman of the Authority of Agriculture and Fisheries Affairs and the son of controversial National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah;
- Shaykh Dr. Ali Al-Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, former

Minister of Communications and the son of Shaykh Salem Al-Ali;  
- Shaykh Sabah Jaber Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Public Ports Authority;  
- Shaykh Salem Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Chairman of the National Committee on Missing and POWs, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Interior;

From the Al-Jaber branch:

- Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior;  
- Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Minister of Defense;  
- Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, Minister of Energy;  
- Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Head of the Citizens, Services and Governmental Bodies Assessment Agency;  
- Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs;  
- Shaykh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan;  
- Shaykh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Governor of Jahra and a son of the late Amir Shaykh Jaber;

Al-Sabah not from two main branches:

- Shaykh Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Governor of Farwaniya;  
- Shaykh Rasheed Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Coordinator of the Ruling Family Council;  
- Shaykh Khaled Abdullah Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, Undersecretary for Protocol and Amiri Chamberlain Affairs at the Amiri Diwan;  
- Shaykh Duaij Al-Malek Al-Sabah, Undersecretary for Social and Labor Affairs; and  
- Shaykh Mohammed Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, Head of the Council of Minister's Legal Advice and Legislation Department.

Notably absent from the meeting were Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, Chief of the National Guard; Shaykh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Deputy National Guard Commander and half-brother of the late Amir; Shaykh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, former Minister of Interior; Shaykh Mishal Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, former State Security Chief; and Shaykh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Director of the (former) Crown Prince's Diwan.

Role of the National Assembly

18. (C) Al-Khubaizi and Al-Sane both said the National Assembly would have to approve Shaykh Saad's removal (unless

KUWAIT 00000184 003 OF 003

he voluntarily abdicates) and the appointment of Shaykh Sabah as Amir, per Article 4 of the Constitution and Articles 3 and 4 of the Succession Law. The focus on Al-Sabah family meetings, however, suggests that there is little doubt where the real decision will be made. One possible result of this situation is that parliamentary approval of Shaykh Sabah as Amir might set a precedence of that could lay the foundation for a constitutional-emirate arrangement in Kuwait.

Support for Smooth Transition

19. (C) Despite the wild rumors, Kuwaitis agree on the need for a smooth power transition. Succession uncertainty was at least partly responsible for a drop in the Kuwaiti stock market on January 21, business leaders assert. They, and most others in the country, strongly support a quick, smooth succession and have no interest in prolonging the current state of uncertainty. Therefore, there is likely to be little, if any, opposition to Shaykh Sabah becoming Amir once the ruling family agrees to fully back him. Contacts have told us that the process is slow because Shaykh Sabah does not wish to be seen as having pushed aside the ailing, but respected Shaykh Saad, rather seeking as broad a consensus as possible in the Al-Sabah family for the leadership transition.

## Impact of Succession on Cabinet Posts

---

¶10. (C) As post reported previously (reftel), Shaykh Sabah's elevation to Amir would have a significant impact on distribution of power in the Cabinet. If Shaykh Dr. Mohammed were appointed Crown Prince and Shaykh Nawaf Prime Minister as is rumored likely, the Foreign Minister and Interior Minister position would need to be filled. Some speculate the appointments could coincide with a Cabinet re-shuffle and that, in addition to the promotion of Shaykh Dr. Mohammed and Shaykh Nawaf, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, both of whom have been heavily criticized by parliamentarians recently, might also be replaced. Without a crystal ball, it is difficult to predict that ultimate outcome of any Cabinet re-shuffle. Post will continue to closely monitor developments both at the senior and Cabinet levels.

\*\*\*\*\*

Visit Embassy Kuwait's Classified Website:

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

You can also access this site through the  
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website

\*\*\*\*\*

LeBaron